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AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 ASMARA 0152

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS MILI ET

SUBJECT: ERITREA: A MILITARY OVERVIEW

REF: ASMARA 0139 (DTG 181230Z FEB 77)

1. SUMMARY: FROM A MILITARY POINT OF VIEW, THE PAST YEAR HAS WITNESSED A SIGNIFICANT DETERIORATION IN THE POSITION OF THE EPMG FORCES, DESPITE AN INCREASE IN THEIR TOTAL COMMITMENT OF TROOPS, AND A CORRESPONDING IMPROVEMENT IN THE POSITION OF INSURGENT FORCES. THE DETERIORATION OF THE EPMG POSITION CAN BE ATTRIBUTED PRIMARILY TO POOR MORALE AND INADEQUATE LEADERSHIP WHICH HAS

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RESULTED IN LOSS OF CONTROL OF VIRTUALLY ALL THE ROADS IN ERITREA, AND EXPANSION OF INSURGENT CONTROL OF RURAL AREAS, THE ABANDONMENT OR LOSS OF SEVERAL TOWNS AND A NUMBER OF OUTPOSTS, AND SIGNAL SETBACKS IN MILITARY ENGAGEMENTS. CONVERSELY, THE INSURGENTS APPEAR TO HAVE GAINED IN BOTH FORCES AND WEAPONS, YET MORE IMPORTANTLY IN MOTIVATION AND TRAINING. NONETHELESS, THE INSURGENT FORCES ARE STILL DIVIDED INTO TWO DISTINCT MOVEMENTS, AND BY

VIRTUE OF NUMBERS AND WEAPONS, THE EPMG FORCES REMAIN MORE THAN A MATCH FOR THE INSURGENTS.

2. GENERAL MILITARY SITUATION: WHILE THIS SECTION WILL HIGHLIGHT THE PRINCIPAL TRENDS IN THE MILITARY SITUATION DURING THE PAST YEAR, WE BELIEVE THAT IT WILL BE BENEFICIAL TO PRESENT A RUNDOWN OF THE MILITARY SITUATION BY PROVINCES IN THE LATTER PART OF THIS REPORT. IN GENERAL TERMS, THE PAST YEAR HAS WITNESSED A MARKED DETERIORATION IN THE MILITARY POSITION OF THE EPMG AND A CORRESPONDING IMPROVEMENT IN THE MILITARY POSITION OF THE INSURGENTS.

3. LAND TRANSPORTATION: A YEAR AGO, LAND TRANSPORTATION WAS HAZARDOUS AND SUBJECT TO HARRASSMENT, WITH CONVOYS ARRIVING EVERY 4 TO 8 WEEKS FROM ADDIS, AND FITFULLY FROM THE WESTERN LOWLANDS. TODAY, ALL THE ROADS EXCEPT THE ASMARA-MASSAWA LINK ARE CONSIDERED CLOSED. THE LAST CONVOY FROM ADDIS ARRIVED 4 MONTHS AGO AND THE ONE PRIOR TO THAT WAS 4 MONTHS BEFORE. AN EPMG CONVOY BROKE THROUGH TO KEREN AS RECENTLY AS NOVEMBER, BUT IN THE SUBSEQUENT FIGHTING THE EPMG LOST OR ABANDONED VIRTUALLY ALL THE STRONGPOINTS PROTECTING THE ROAD. THE LAST EASTBOUND CONVOY FROM TESSENNEY TO ASMARA WAS ATTACKED REPEATEDLY AND ABANDONED ITS EFFORT AT AGORDAT, LESS THAN HALFWAY. A CURRENT EFFORT TO DRIVE A CONVOY THROUGH TO ADI UGRI, 54 KM SOUTH OF ASMARA ON THE MAIN ROAD TO ADDIS, HAS BEEN BLOCKED IN HEAVY FIGHTING WITHIN 30 KM OF ASMARA. THESE UNSUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES BY THE EPMG HAVE RESULTED IN THE STRANDING OF OVER 100 TRUCKS IN KEREN AND A LIKE NUMBER IN AGORDAT. THE ROAD TO MASSAWA REMAINS THE ONLY SURFACE LINK TO THE REST OF ETHIOPIA, ALTHOUGH SUBJECT TO REBEL ACTIVITY AT ANY TIME. DURING THE COURSE OF THE YEAR, AS AMBUSHES ON THE ROUTE HAVE INCREASED, CONFIDENTIAL

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ESCORT FORCES FOR THE CONVOYS HAVE BEEN GREATLY STRENGTHENED.

4. CONTROL OF COUNTRYSIDE: THE PAST YEAR HAS ALSO WITNESSED AN EXPANSION OF CONTROL OF THE COUNTRYSIDE BY THE INSURGENTS. SUCH GAINS WERE NOT MASSIVE, AS MOST RURAL AREAS IN ERITREA WERE CONSIDERED INSURGENT-DOMINATED FOR SOME TIME. YET THE REBELS CONTROL HAS GROWN BOTH IN GEOGRAPHICAL TERMS AND PERVASIVENESS OF INSURGENT INFRASTRUCTURE. THE LARGEST SINGLE GEOGRAPHIC GAIN RESULTED FROM THE ABORTIVE "RED MARCH" IN MAY AND JUNE, 1976. THE GROSS MISHANDLING OF THAT CAMPAIGN BY THE EPMG RESULTED IN WIDESPREAD ALIENATION OF THE INHABITANTS OF NORTHERN TIGRE AND BEGEMDIR. THIS ALIENATION WAS TRANSLATED INTO A WELCOMING OF BOTH ELF AND EPLF (NOW TERMED EPF) INSURGENTS INTO THIS REGION, AND COOPERATION OF THE ERITREANS WITH LOCAL DISSIDENT GROUPS. THIS ACTION AFFORDED THE ERITREANS AN ADDITIONAL BUFFER AGAINST AN ETHIOPIAN SWEEP NORTHWARD AND DENIED THE EPMG EASY ACCESS TO SEVERAL STRATEGIC TOWNS WHICH COULD BE STAGING AREAS INTO ERITREA. DURING THE COURSE OF THE YEAR, INSURGENT CADRES AND ADMINISTRATORS HAVE STRENGTHENED THEIR CONTROL OF THE RURAL AREAS

IN WHICH THEY OPERATE FREELY. REPORTS CLAIM THAT INSURGENTS HAVE ESTABLISHED MARKET TOWNS IN THEIR AREAS AS ALTERNATIVES TO MARKETS IN TOWNS CONTROLLED BY THE EPMG. SUCH NEW MARKETS HAVE NECESSITATED AN ALTERNATIVE NETWORK OF ROADS AND TRAILS, THUS AVOIDING THE EXISTING ROADS WHICH ARE VULNERABLE TO EPMG AIR STRIKES. THE REBELS HAVE BROADENED THEIR TAX COLLECTION SYSTEM WHICH, WHILE LEVYING ONLY NOMINAL AMOUNTS, SERVES TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR AUTHORITY. THEY HAVE ALSO EXPANDED THEIR RUDIMENTARY EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM, AND IN SOME AREAS ARE PROVIDING HEALTH SERVICES.

5. EPMG CONSOLIDATION: PERHAPS THE MOST DRAMATIC ASPECT OF THE DETERIORATION OF THE EPMG'S MILITARY SITUATION HAS BEEN THE LOSS OR ABANDONMENT OF SEVERAL TOWNS AND A NUMBER OF SMALL OUTPOSTS. IN DECEMBER, THE COMMANDER OF THE ETHIOPIAN GARRISON AT KARORA WHICH HAD BEEN UNDER SIEGE FOR 3 MONTHS, MARCHED HIS REMAINING FORCE INTO INTERMENT IN SUDAN WHEN INSURGENT PRESSURE THWARTED EVACUATION OPERATION. IN MID-JANUARY, ELEMENTS OF THE 4TH BN
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GARRISONING OM HAGER WERE OVERRUN BY ELF TROOPS AT THE SAME TIME AS THE EDU CAPTURE OF HUMERA ON THE BEGEMDIR SIDE OF THE SETIT RIVER. ALSO IN DECEMBER, THE COMMANDO POLICE (CP) GARRISON AT HABRAN KAKA ON THE KEREN ROAD WAS OVERRUN AND SOME 80 CPS WERE KILLED OR CAPTURED. DURING THIS SAME THREE-MONTH PERIOD THE EPMG

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COMMAND ABANDONED ONE OUTPOST TOWN ON THE KEREN ROAD, AND TWO ON THE ROAD FROM BARENTU TO TESSENNEY. IN THESE CASES, THE ENTIRE EPMG BUREAUCRATIC INFRASTRUCTURE WAS WITHDRAWN AS WELL. AS AN EXTENSION OF THIS CONSOLIDATION, THREE OUTPOSTS AROUND ASMARA AND SEVERAL IN THE VICINITY OF TESSENNEY AND AGORDAT WERE ABANDONED. THIS CONSOLIDATION AND REDEPLOYMENT STEMS FROM THE EPMG MILITARY'S DESIRE TO STRENGTHEN THEIR GRASP IN THE MAJOR TOWNS AND TO MINIMIZE THE DANGER TO TROOPS IN EXPOSED POSITIONS.

6. MILITARY ENGAGEMENTS: DURING THE PAST YEAR, EPMG FORCES ENGAGED IN LESS THAN A HALF DOZEN SIGNIFICANT OPERATIONS AGAINST THE INSURGENTS IN THE FIELD. ALL SUCH OPERATIONS WERE IN RESPONSE TO REBEL INITIATIVES AND NONE OF THEM COULD BE CONSIDERED TO BE MORE THAN CONFIDENTIAL

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MARGINALLY SUCCESSFUL. MOST OF THESE ENGAGEMENTS WERE FOUGHT ALONG THE ROAD NETWORK IN AN EFFORT TO BRING RAW MATERIALS TO ASMARA OR TRANSPORT SUPPLIES TO BELEAGUERED TOWNS AND GARRISONS. THERE WERE NO MAJOR OPERATIONS LAUNCHED TO CLEAR AREAS OF INSURGENTS OR TO DESTROY INSURGENT BASES AND SUPPLIES. THEIR MOST SUCCESSFUL OPERATION WAS CLEARING THE KEREN ROAD IN NOVEMBER, WHICH PERMITTED A CONVOY TO TRAVEL TO THAT TOWN. THE SUBSEQUENT BATTLE INVOLVING THESE SAME FORCES IN AN EFFORT TO RELIEVE NACFA PROVED THE EPMG'S MOST SIGNIFICANT SETBACK, EXCEEDING THAT ENTAILED IN THE LOSS OF KARORA OR OM HAGER. ONCE ENGAGED WITH INSURGENT FORCES, THE EPMG TROOPS DEMONSTRATE STEADFASTNESS, SPIRIT AND A FLEXIBILITY IN THE USE OF WEAPONS AND TACTICS. THEIR PRINCIPAL FAILING HAS BEEN LACK OF INITIATIVE DUE TO INADEQUATE AND VACILLATING LEADERSHIP, AND THEIR INABILITY TO SUSTAIN AN OPERATION LOGISTICALLY.

7. EPMG FORCES: DURING THE PAST YEAR EPMG FORCES HAVE INCREASED APPRECIABLY IN NUMBERS, BUT ONLY MARGINALLY IN WEAPONS. IT IS ESTIMATED THAT THERE ARE 32 ARMY BATTALIONS (BN) AND AT LEAST 4 COMMANDO POLICE BN IN ERITREA. ADDITIONAL UNITS ASSIGNED TO THE REGION DURING THIS PERIOD INCLUDE 9 RESERVIST ("FATHER FIGHTER") BN, 2 TO 3 FLAME BN, AT LEAST 2 BN FROM HARERGE, AND ONE CP BN. DURING THE YEAR THE 4TH BN WAS ALL BUT ANNIHILATED AT HUMERA AND OM HAGER, AND THE 15TH AND THE AIRBORNE BN HAVE BEEN SEVERELY WEAKENED BY CASUALTIES, AND IN THE LATTER CASE BY DEFECTIONS.

INCLUDING ARMY SUPPORT UNITS, THE NAVY AND AIR FORCE DETACHMENTS, THE TOTAL EPMG FORCES IN ERITREA APPROACH 30,000. THERE HAS BEEN A GENERAL UPGRADING OF SMALL ARMS WITH MORE AUTOMATIC WEAPONS IN EVIDENCE. THERE HAS BEEN ONLY A MARGINAL IMPROVEMENT IN HEAVIER WEAPONS ALTHOUGH SOME ADDITIONAL ARTILLERY AND ARMORED VEHICLES RECENTLY ARRIVED. THE LATTER WERE PROBABLY OFFSET BY COMBAT LOSSES OVER RECENT MONTHS. THE EAF APPEARS TO MAINTAIN A POLICY OF MINIMIZING THE NUMBER OF AIRCRAFT THEY WILL PUT AT RISK BY STATIONING IN ERITREA. THE NORMAL COMPLEMENT OF AIRCRAFT AT ASMARA MILITARY AIR BASE, THE PRINCIPAL EAF FACILITY IN ERITREA IS 7 F-86, 2 TO 4 F-5, 5 T-28 AND 3 DC-3 AIRCRAFT. ADDITIONAL
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FIGHTER AND TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT ARE BROUGHT INTO THE REGION AS REQUIRED. EPMG HELICOPTER CAPABILITY DEPLOYED IN THE REGION IS MINIMAL PERMITTING ONLY LIMITED RESUPPLY, INSERTION AND EVACUATION MISSIONS. THEY ARE USED EXTENSIVELY FOR ARTILLERY AND AIR SUPPORT OBSERVATION. EPMG NAVAL FORCES APPEAR TO BE ADEQUATE TO DETER THE DIMINISHING VOLUME OF SUPPLIES FERRIED ACROSS THE RED SEA BY THE INSURGENTS. THE MOST CRITICAL DRAWBACK TO THE COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS OF EPMG FORCES IS POOR DISCIPLINE AND MORALE. THE KEY TO THESE PROBLEMS IS INADEQUATE AND EVER-CHANGING LEADERSHIP. UP UNTIL JULY 10, 1976, MILITARY LEADERSHIP, AS WELL AS CIVIL ADMINISTRATION, WAS FIRMLY IN THE HANDS OF BG GETACHEW NADEW, THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR. GETACHEW WAS KILLED IN ADDIS AT THE BEHEST OF THE DIRG WHEN ON A MISSION TO PRESENT THE PROBLEMS AND GRIEVANCES OF HIS TROOPS TO THE EPMG. AFTER A LAPSE OF ALMOST A MONTH, A MORE JUNIOR AND MUCH MORE CIRCUMSPECT REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR WAS APPOINTED. HE HAS DISPLAYED ONLY MINIMAL INTEREST IN MILITARY OPERATIONS WHICH THEN DEVOLVED ON THE SECOND DIVISION COMMANDER, COL. TELEHUN. THE LATTER, A CAREER INTELLIGENCE STAFF OFFICER, ALTHOUGH CLEVER, WAS NOT AGGRESSIVE AND COULD NOT COMMAND THE RESPECT OF HIS TROOPS. HE WAS TRANSFERRED TO ADDIS IN EARLY OCTOBER FOR HIS INEPT CONDUCT FOLLOWING A CLOUDED MUTINY INCIDENT. HE WAS REPLACED BY THE CAPABLE AND AGGRESSIVE COL. ALEMAYEHU WHO REIMPOSED A DEGREE OF DISCIPLINE AND GAINED THE RESPECT OF THE TROOPS. ALEMAYEHU FACED AN UPHILL STRUGGLE, HOWEVER, AS INSURGENT PRESSURES MOUNTED AND LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS MULTIPLIED. THEN IN MID-JANUARY, ALEMAYEHU RETURNED TO ADDIS WITH A CHRONIC BACK AILMENT AND COMMAND FELL ON HIS LESS COMPETENT DEPUTY. OTHER FACTORS IN POOR MORALE HAVE BEEN SHIFTING POLICIES OF DIRG AND THE INCESSANT LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS. DESPITE THE FOREGOING, EPMG FORCES IN ERITREA REMAIN THE DOMINANT MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE REGION AND FULLY CAPABLE OF COUNTERING A MILITARY TAKEOVER BY THE INSURGENTS.

8. INSURGENT FORCES: JUDGED BY THEIR VARIOUS SUCCESSES DURING THE PAST YEAR, WHAT THE EPMG FORCES HAVE LOST IN INITIATIVE AND AGGRESSIVENESS, THE INSURGENTS HAVE GAINED PROPORTIONATELY. IN SPITE OF
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LOSSES, THE NUMBER OF TRAINED INSURGENTS IN THE FIELD HAS INCREASED, THE NUMBER AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THEIR WEAPONS HAS BEEN UPGRADED AND THERE IS A NOTICEABLE IMPROVEMENT IN THE COORDINATION OF MILITARY OPERATIONS BOTH WITHIN AND BETWEEN THE TWO PRINCIPAL

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FACTIONS. YET THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT HAS BEEN A BOOST IN INITIATIVE AND MOTIVATION. TO MUSTER SUFFICIENT TROOPS TO BLOCK A 2500-MAN EPMG FORCE WITH ARMOR AND AIR SUPPORT FROM RELIEVING NACFA CLEARLY DEMONSTRATES BOTH INDIVIDUAL TENACITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL ABILITY. DESPITE AN IMPRESSIVE DISPLAY OF THESE QUALITIES, THE INSURGENTS STILL LACK THE SENSE OF SACRIFICE ESSENTION TO MILITARY SUCCESS. THEY HAVE BESIEGED THE SMALL EPMG GARRISON AT NACFA FOR OVER FIVE MONTHS WITH MUCH SUPERIOR FORCES, BUT APPEAR UNWILLING TO ACCEPT THE NECESSARY CAS-

UALTIES TO OVERRUN IT. THIS EXAMPLE HAS BEEN REPEATED ON A SMALLER SCALE THROUGHOUT THE REGION, AND THE FAILING IS ENDEMIC TO THE ERITREANS CONDUCT OF THE INSURGENCY. DURING THE YEAR, IN ORDER TO AVOID SEVERE REPRISALS, INSURGENTS HAVE SHIFTED THEIR TARGETTING
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OF VICTIMS FOR ASSASSINATION FROM SENIOR ETHIOPIAN OFFICIALS TO MINOR SECURITY OFFICIALS AND ERITREAN INFORMERS. LIKEWISE IT IS EVIDENT THAT THEY HAVE YET TO ACCEPT THE ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES TO THE CIVIL POPULATION OF INTERDICTING THE ASMARA-MASSAWA ROAD. EVEN MORE DEBILITATING IS THE INSURGENTS' FAILURE TO UNIFY THEIR MOVEMENT POLITICALLY. THE PAST YEAR WITNESSED THE GROWTH OF A THIRD FORCE WHICH IS LED BY EPLF OUTCAST OSMAN SALEH SABBE, AND IS SAID TO CONSIST OF PERHAPS 2000 INSURGENTS LOYAL TO HIM. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE ELF AND THE EPF HAVE NOT NARROWED, THE FORMER REMAINING RURAL, MUSLIM, AND CONSERVATIVE AND THE LATTER BEING URBAN, CHRISTIAN AND MARXIST IN ORIENTATION. NONE OF THE NUMEROUS EFFORTS TO BRING THESE TWO GROUPS TOGETHER HAS BORNE FRUIT, ALTHOUGH ANOTHER MEETING BETWEEN THE FACTIONS IS SCHEDULED FOR LATE FEBRUARY. NOW THAT PRESIDENT NUMEIRI HAS PUBLICLY SUPPORTED ERITREAN INDEPENDENCE, STRONG SUDANESE PRESSURE FOR UNIFICATION IS ANTICIPATED.

9. THE POSITIONS: IN ORDER TO GIVE A MORE COMPREHENSIVE PICTURE OF THE RELATIVE POSITION OF THE OPPOSING FORCES, WE OFFER A BRIEF RUNDOWN BY THE NINE PROVINCES IN THE REGION. BEGINNING IN THE NORTH, SAHEL PROVINCE HARBORS THE EPF PRINCIPAL BASE CAMPS, AND THE EPMG CAN CLAIM ONLY THE BESIEGED GARRISON IN THE PROVINCIAL CAPITAL OF NACFA, AND A SOMEWHAT LARGER LIAISON FORCE AT AFABET. RURAL AREAS IN AGORDAT PROVINCE ARE CONTROLLED LARGELY BY ELF FORCES WITH SOME EPF TROOPS, WHILE THE EPMG HOLDS THE PROVINCIAL CAPITAL AGORDAT. A MIXED FORCE OF ELF AND EPF OPERATE IN KEREN PROVINCE, WHILE THE CAPITAL OF KEREN IS CONTROLLED BY SEVERAL THOUSAND BALKY EPMG TROOPS. THE EPMG ALSO RETAINS THE EMBATTLED OUTPOST AT ELABERET ON THE KEREN ROAD. GASH SETIT PROVINCE IS THE SITE OF ELF BASE CAMPS. EPMG TROOPS GARRISON BARENTU, THE CAPITAL AND TESSENNEY, BOTH SUBJECT TO SPORADIC INSURGENT PRESSURE. MASSAWA PROVINCE IS MOSTLY EPF COUNTRY ALTHOUGH THE EPMG FIRMLY HOLDS MASSAWA. THE EPMG HAS SIZABLE FORCES AT DONGOLO AND GHINDA, AND SEVERAL OUTPOSTS GUARDING THE ASMARA-MASSAWA ROAD. THE RURAL AREAS IN HAMASIEN, LIKE THE OTHER TWO "HIGHLAND" PROVINCES, ARE CONTROLLED BY MIXED ELF AND EPF FORCES.
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THE EPMG HAS SOME 10,000 TROOPS SECURELY HOLDING THE PROVINCIAL AND REGIONAL CAPITAL OF ASMARA AND A DIMINISHED NUMBER OF OUTPOSTS

NEAR THE CITY. IN SERAE, THE EPMG OCCUPIES AREZA, ADI UGRI AND ADI KWALA WITH LITTLE INSURGENT HARRASSMENT, AND A POSITION AT DEBAROA WHICH IS CURRENTLY SUBJECT TO REBEL ATTACK. IN AKELE GUZAI, THE EPMG IS STATIONED IN THE TOWNS OF DECAMERE, SAGAN-ETTI, ADI CAIEH, DIGSA AND SENAFE, ALL SUBJECT TO OCCASIONAL INSURGENT PRESSURE. THE COASTAL PROVINCE OF ASSAB IS LARGELY INERT, WITH SCATTERED BANDS OF ELF AND AFARS POSING NO SERIOUS THREAT TO THE PORT/REFINERY TOWN OF ASSAB.

10. PROGNOSIS: WHILE THE RELATIVE POSITION OF THE INSURGENTS HAS IMPROVED AND THAT OF THE EPMG FORCES HAS DETERIORATED, THE MILITARY ADVANTAGE STILL RESTS WITH THE EPMG. THE IMPACT OF SUDANESE SUPPORT FOR THE INSURGENTS IS YET TO BE DEMONSTRATED ON A MILITARY LEVEL, BUT WILL CERTAINLY PROVE CONSEQUENTIAL IN THE COMING YEAR. THE INSURGENTS WILL INCREASE IN NUMBERS AND WEAPONS AS THEIR MOMENTUM BUILDS. THE PROFOUND DIFFERENCES AMONG THE FACTIONS WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE AND THIS WILL LIMIT THEIR MILITARY SUCCESS. THE EPMG FORCES CAN BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE THEIR POLICY OF CONSOLIDATION AND REDEPLOYMENT BOTH TO MAINTAIN THEIR GRIP ON THE PRINCIPAL TOWNS AND TO PERMIT FLEXIBILITY TO TRANSFER TROOPS TO OTHER TROUBLE SPOTS IN ETHIOPIA. THEY HAVE APPARENTLY ABANDONED HOPE OF REOPENING THE ROAD NETWORK AND ARE UNWILLING TO COMMIT THE FORCE NECESSARY TO RE-ESTABLISH THE LARGELY DEVASTATED AGRICULTURAL ESTATES AT TESSENNEY, ELABERET AND ELSEWHERE. THESE REALITIES RENDER THEIR EFFORTS DEVOID OF ECONOMIC JUSTIFICATION. YET THEIR NUMBERS, WEAPONS AND TRAINING MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR THE EPMG FORCES TO DENY THE KEY TOWNS TO THE REBELS FOR AN INDEFINITE PERIOD. DISREGARDING THE MYRIAD OF POSSIBLE DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL POLITICAL SCENARIOS WHICH MAY DECIDE THE FUTURE OF ERITREA, THE ONLY DECISIVE MILITARY FACTOR WILL BE THE MORALE AND LOYALTY OF THE EPMG TROOPS. THE STRESSES ON THESE DISILLUSIONED AND ISOLATED SOLDIERS ARE MANIFOLD, AND UNLESS A SINCERE INITIATIVE IS UNDERTAKEN FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT IN ERITREA, IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT THEIR WILL TO FIGHT MAY COLLAPSE ENTIRELY.

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